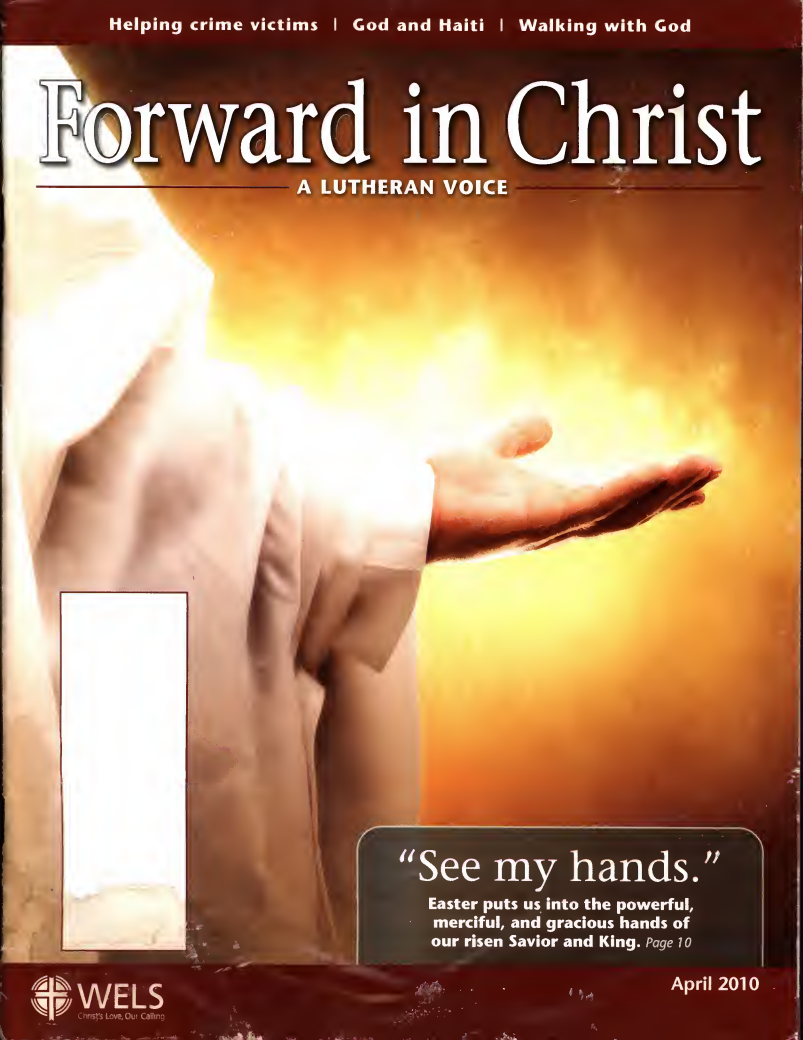


Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



“See my hands.”

Easter puts us into the powerful, merciful, and gracious hands of our risen Savior and King. *Page 10*



WELS
CHRIST'S LOVE, OUR CALLING

April 2010

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FEATURES

- 10 Easter puts us in good hands**
The hands of Jesus show us just how powerful, how merciful, and how gracious our Savior is.
Paul C. Tessmer

- 12 God speaks: Prophecy in the New Testament**
The new era of prophecy focused on the development of the Christian church.
John C. Jeske

- 14 Confessions of faith**
A woman wanders from faith only to have the Holy Spirit lead her back to her roots.
Jamie Bruen

- 16 Christ's love**
Jesus' means of grace always work.
John M. Brenner

- 28 The Eighth Commandment**
You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
James A. Aderman

- 30 A fearless faith**
A mother lets her faith and joy in the Lord show as she fights for victims' rights.
Linda R. Buxa

- 36 Everything in its place**
Jesus' resurrection has a way of putting things back in their proper place.
Aaron L. Christie

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POSTMASTER
Send address changes to Forward in Christ, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Individual: USA—\$16; Canada—\$16.96; all other countries—air mail \$48.40. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. www.nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO
Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

COVER PHOTO: iSTOCKPHOTO

May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us.—1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

As Christians, we can see God's hands directing our lives (though sometimes we do forget to look). Our cover story this month takes an even closer look at the hands of Jesus and what those hands have done to bring us salvation and peace (p. 10).

Sometimes we question the direction that God takes. Why does God allow certain events to happen around the world or even in our lives? Where is the hand of God when massive earthquakes kill thousands of people and cause millions of dollars in damage? Two articles this month talk about that very question and take us to the Bible for answers (p. 8 & 9).

Both of those articles remind us that tragedies often offer Christians an opportunity to show love and compassion to those in need. WELS members have responded to those hurting after the earthquake in Haiti. See how WELS is reaching out to meet the spiritual and physical needs of these people (p. 20). Then look for opportunities in your own life to help someone who is struggling. Who knows what doors may be opened? Who knows what God has planned?

Julie Wietzke



IN EVERY ISSUE

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 6 | Feedback
Readers share their opinions | 26 | Bulletin board
Announcements from around the synod |
| 7 | Devotion
Rejoice in Easter's mission impossible | 27 | Potluck
A variety of content and photos |
| 8 | From the president's desk
Answers to the question, Why? | 32 | Editorial comment
Why do you play the games you do? |
| 9 | Question & answer
Suffering in Haiti | 33 | Bible study
Heroes of faith |
| 18 | Teen talk
A whole new world | 34 | A thought
Real warmth |
| 19 | News
What's happening in WELS | 35 | Interactive Bible study
Portraits of a mature Christian |

The Fifth Commandment



THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

In reference to Pastor Aderman's discussion of the Fifth Commandment [Jan.], we need to remember an important option passed over in the article—adoption. Painful as the decision to give up the child might be for the mother, it is sometimes in the best interest for everyone, including the child. Many childless couples are desperate to become parents and can provide a much richer spiritual and domestic environment than the one afforded by a struggling single parent. Moreover, this is often a win-win result, where Claudia, now more circumspect, gets a second chance and can fulfill her dreams of "becoming a surgeon."

David
McLean, Virginia

Re: James Aderman's article on abortion entitled, "The Fifth Commandment" [Jan.]. At first I read with admiration and satisfaction as he explained how sinful it is to take unborn human life, how contrary to Scripture. And then I was appalled at what I read when he answered the question, "So is abortion ever the best option?" He said in rare cases to save the life of the mother it might be appropriate. Such hypocrisy! I am astounded. Taking life from those who cannot defend themselves is wrong, as the Lord teaches us. There are no "if" statements in Scripture with regard to sin...

I'm disappointed in FIC for printing such a statement that would lead weak Christians into believing there can be exceptions to right and wrong. As Scripture warns us, let us not be like the man who look[s] at himself in the mirror, and then walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Glenn M. Brunner
Kewaunee, Wisconsin

The article made it clear that there was no compromise with the principle God provided in the Fifth Commandment, "You should not kill." But in some situations we are faced with the choice of which life do we save and which life do we not save. While making every effort to save both, it may require a decision to save one rather than lose both. Pastor Aderman also made it clear that these are rare circumstances. In those situations we follow God's directions as well as we can and pray for his guidance and forgiveness.—ed.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JESUS

Each person who read December's *Forward in Christ* has a different opinion about a cupcake for Jesus' birthday.

When my husband and I had our first two sons, they came to me one day before Christmas. (They were five and three at the time.) They said, "Mommy, you bake a birthday cake for everyone. Why don't you bake a birthday cake for Jesus?" Two little boys who knew their Savior was special and should be remembered on his birthday. Needless to say, for 55 years, we have a Jesus birthday cake, with everyone gathered around to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus...

A birthday cake may seem secular to some people, but in our family, we all, young and old, know why we find Christmas so special. We remember Jesus comes before gifts...

Lila Jeseritz
Wood Lake, Minnesota

The December cover was perfect! The cupcake with a candle in it brought sweet memories of long ago. When our sons were small, we always had a birthday cake for Jesus. It had to be special, their favorite: chocolate with white fluffy frosting, topped with a plastic Nativity scene and three white candles on the cake—one for the Father, one for the Son (Jesus), and one for the Holy Ghost. Dad lit the candles, and we all sang "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. Our youngest son's eyes lit up. He clapped his little hands, smiled, and jumped up and down as he anxiously awaited his piece of Jesus' birthday cake.

Birthdays are special to children. Jesus is special. I can understand adults thinking the cover should have been something better, but I was happy for the memories

of when our little ones thought of Jesus being so special. As they grew older, they knew what Christmas was all about in a much more profound way.

Linda White
Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin

THE FUTURE OF OUR SYNOD

I couldn't agree more with Pastor Sims' article, "The future of our synod" [Jan.]. Empowering young people by "letting go" is a great way to make a long-term investment in the church of Christ. Giving teens opportunities to lead Bible studies and other Christian activities allows them to develop and share their own faith. Leading other Christians is something that nearly every Christian will do at some point whether it is parents leading their children, one friend helping another through a difficult time, or someone pointing a new convert toward Christ. Let go and pass the baton!

Scott Voigt
Annapolis, Maryland

NEW TAGLINE

I love the new look for *Forward in Christ*. However, I must take you to task on one item—A Lutheran Voice. Really? Is the intent to convey that *Forward in Christ* is on par with *The Lutheran* when it comes to speaking the truth? I certainly do not believe so. No tagline would be better than the one you chose.

Brent Nemmers
Allen, Texas

CONFESSION OF FAITH

The article by Justin Shrum ["Confessions of faith," Feb.] is outstanding. Like Justin, I am a former sailor.

I'm looking to spread the good news, and this is the perfect article! Please pass that to Justin—the Holy Spirit is working through him, his wife, his pastor, the editor of *Forward in Christ*, etc.

Martin Schwenke
Manassas, Virginia

Send your letters to *Feedback*, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd., Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of *WELS* or *Forward in Christ*.

Rejoice in Easter's mission impossible

So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" Matthew 27:66; 28:1-4, 11-13

Norman F. Burger Jr.

When I was a boy, Saturday night at 9:00 was *Mission Impossible* time. Every week Jim Phelps and his crack espionage team would be given their mission. It might be to topple a dictator or free a political prisoner. But whatever the mission was, it was so difficult and risky that it could be called mission impossible.

THE SOLDIERS' IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

The soldiers assigned to guard Jesus' tomb were given a mission that seemed so easy that it could have been called mission impossible *to fail*. Their mission was to make sure that Jesus' disciples would not steal his body from the tomb and then claim a resurrection. The soldiers on guard duty at the tomb were not worried about their mission. That is until the early hours of Sunday morning.

That is when an earthquake shook the soldiers awake so they could see a gleaming angel move the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. Then they saw the inside of the tomb. Their mission was a failure. Jesus was gone. He had risen from the dead. Their assignment to keep God's Son in his grave had been a mission impossible.

That's obviously good news for us

who are banking our eternal future on Jesus' promises. So don't let the solid metal alloy exterior of that casket fool you, or the thick concrete liner around it, or the six-foot-deep hole in the ground, or the amount of time it is in the grave. Conquering death and escaping the grave for all who trust in Jesus is not mission impossible—not since Jesus himself did it and promises that we will too.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF KEEPING THE NEWS FROM SPREADING

But keeping Jesus from rising from the dead was not the only mission impossible of Easter. Trying to stop the resurrection truth from spreading was just as much a mission impossible.

The religious leaders of the Jews tried to do that. They bribed the soldiers to say that Jesus' disciples stole his body. They hoped to squelch forever the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

Oops! A little miscalculation there. A mere 50 days later more than three thousand people would believe Peter's Pentecost message that Jesus was the promised Savior, who died for our sins and rose again. This powerful gospel kept right on spreading to the point that this Easter billions of people will celebrate Jesus' resurrection.



Today, there is one more mission impossible: to continue to share the Easter message in a world that opposes such good news. But with God nothing is impossible.

Contributing editor Norman Burger is pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, Lansing, Michigan.



Mark Schweden

Events that look tragic on the surface also open doors of opportunity for God's people to share the gospel with people who otherwise may not listen.

Answers to the question, Why?

Even though more than two months have passed since an earthquake struck the nation of Haiti, the images of that disaster are still fresh in our minds. We remember scenes of incredible and widespread devastation and destruction.

When tragedy strikes, there are always those who ask the question, Why? Most of the answers you hear are simply wrong or irrelevant. Religious leaders like Pat Robertson, claiming to know the mind of God, immediately declared that the quake was God's way of punishing Haitians for the widespread practice of voodoo. Politicians jump in as a way to bolster their own standing; Hugo Chavez, the eccentric leader of Venezuela, made the outrageous and incredible claim that the quake was intentionally caused by some unexplained activity of the U.S. military.

It's not wrong to ask why when tragedies like this strike. But it's vitally important that we find the answer to that question in the right place—the pages of Holy Scripture. There God gives us all the information we need to get the right answers to our questions.

God had pronounced the world he created "very good." It was a world without sin, without death, without accidents or tragedies, without tears and sorrow. But sin changed all of that. The results of sin would not only affect the people that God had created as the crown of his creation but would also affect and infect the created world itself. Paul wrote, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22). Simply put, tragedies and disasters are natural results of a world that is broken because of sin.

Jesus also tells us that events such as the Haiti quake are signs that the end of this creation is approaching. Jesus said, "Nation will rise against nation,

and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:7,8). An event like the Haiti quake is just one more reminder that our Savior's return could happen at any time.

Jesus also said that events like this are intended to lead people to genuine repentance. A number of Galileans had been slaughtered by Pontius Pilate. In another incident many people died when the Siloam tower collapsed on them. Some asked Jesus if this happened because the victims were more wicked than other people. Jesus simply answered, "No!" and then encouraged repentance (Luke 13:1-5).

There are also biblical examples of how human suffering can give God's people an opportunity to show their faith. The famine in Jerusalem was the reason Paul encouraged Christians to gather a special offering of love. The relief effort in Haiti is one more way in which WELS members today can show Christian love to those in need.

Events that look tragic on the surface also open doors of opportunity for God's people to share the gospel with people who otherwise may not listen. It was a shipwreck that gave Paul an audience to share God's love in Jesus. It was Paul's unjust imprisonment that gave him the opportunity to proclaim the gospel in the palace of Caesar himself. Sickness, disease, and death brought people to Jesus for help, and it was in the middle of physical human suffering that Jesus gave them healing for their sin-sick souls.

Why? We don't have to look any further than the pages of God's Word for the answers to that question. Let's make sure we listen to the answers that God gives.

How do we explain the suffering in Haiti

from a religious perspective? God, who is loving and all-powerful, allows things to happen for the good of those who put their trust in him. But this destruction, pain, and suffering leave me sputtering.

Forrest L. Bivens

Thanks for asking. And thanks for expressing your personal discomfort or distress about the "destruction, pain, and suffering" described in news reports coming out of Haiti. Every child of God shares this same kind of discomfort since compassion is a trait believers are quick to express.

You ask how we may testify to others regarding God and his role in such disasters that have marked so much of human history since the fall into sin and will continue to do so (see Matthew 24:7-8). When we are tempted to question divine wisdom or love, our starting point is God's saving work for us sinners through Jesus Christ. Then we will appreciate him as our loving Father in heaven and will be content with what he chooses for us in our lives and what he chooses at a given time for the lives and deaths of others. We will also see disasters as opportunities to show compassion and kindness to those who suffer.

We properly acknowledge that God is the primary agent of all things as Isaiah 45:7 says: "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things." God was not surprised by this earthquake or any of the five other earthquakes that took place in the world that same week.

But why did they happen? It is impossible to answer this question fully or authoritatively because God has not revealed all the answers to our "Why?" questions. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8). Yet he reveals many reasons for allowing painful things to be a part of our lives. He may test our faith, force us to turn to his promises for strength, keep us humble when we become arrogant, and challenge us to grow to a wiser perspective. But no one explanation fits all of God's wise works in our lives.

God does these things also with unbelievers in mind. God's love for his creatures and his anger against sin

are factors in all of God's doings as well, but we are insufficient to sort all of this out in a given event. We simply confess that an event like the earthquake in Haiti expresses God's wisdom, love, and anger blended in a way that is beyond our full understanding.

Through the earthquake, God brought many of our brothers and sisters in Christ to glory through death. He also ended the time of grace for many who despised Christ and the gospel and ushered them into eternal death. He alerted the people on earth again to the temporary nature of this world. He challenged us all to sort priorities, to ponder the signs of the times, and ultimately to focus on Christ who came and who will come again. He stimulated consciences so people would seek satisfactory relief at the only true place, the foot of Christ's cross. And, of course, he calls us to humbly bow to his wisdom and providence, to trust his promises of love, and to rejoice that in the new heavens and new earth these things will no longer happen.

Then our compassion for those in Haiti and around the world will move us to pray for them, assist them as best we can, and share Jesus with them.

Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.



EASTER

puts us in good hands

The hands of Jesus show us just how powerful,
how merciful, and how gracious our Savior is.

Paul C. Tessmer



Tiny hands clasped the fingers of his mother, Mary, giving no indication that this was the very Son of God. Powerful hands were held up to the heavens during a fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee, joined with the mighty command, "Quiet! Be still!" And the storm stopped immediately. Providing hands took a few rolls and pieces of fish, lifted them up to heaven in blessing, and thousands were fed. Healing hands touched the blind, the deaf, and the leper, and all were cured instantly.

Hands can reveal much about a person. Consider the rough, calloused hands of a construction worker or the skilled, precise hands of a surgeon. Both sets of hands tell us a great deal about the individual.

This Easter we do well to consider the hands of Jesus. They show us just how powerful, how merciful, and how gracious our Savior is.

POWERFUL HANDS

How can we comprehend it? The hands of the ruler of the wind and waves took a towel and basin of water and became serving hands, washing the smelly, dusty, sinful feet of his disciples. They were all too proud for such a dirty job, but not Jesus! He showed his strength in hands engaged in humble service.

How can we comprehend it? The hands that formed each of us and knit us together in our mother's womb, those life-giving hands were pierced by nails and given over to death that we might live forever. Jesus showed his strength in allowing his powerful hands to be wounded for us.

How can we comprehend it? Jesus folded his hands in prayer, handing himself over to the will of his Father. He could have said, "No, I won't do it. I won't go to the cross to suffer and die. I don't deserve that." But we hear something far different: "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus entrusted himself to his Father's plan and into his Father's hands. He died, willingly, for our sin-stained hands, not with fear but with the confident cry, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus showed his strength by placing himself into the hands of his heavenly Father—all for us.

MERCIFUL HANDS

Thomas, like the rest of the disciples, had seen Jesus' hands in action for three years. But he would never look at them the same way after that Sunday evening a week after the first Easter.

You remember Thomas, don't you? He was the disciple who wasn't there to see his risen Lord that first Easter evening. Thomas has gone through history with the adjective *doubting* stuck in front of his name. Doubting Thomas. He thought he had seen the last of his teacher and friend when Jesus was nailed to the cross and buried in a borrowed tomb. Now, thinking that his Savior was dead, Thomas was filled with fear and doubt. Oh, yes, he had heard the rumors that Jesus was alive. His friends had even told Thomas that they had seen the Savior. But, for doubting Thomas, that was not enough. His friend and fellow disciple John tells us, "Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it'" (John 20:24,25).

Thomas insisted on seeing his Savior's wounded hands with his own two eyes. It was a request he had no right to make. It showed a lack of faith that deserved rebuke, not mercy. Yet what do we hear our Savior say to this doubter? "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27).

With Thomas we see the hands of Jesus and marvel. Those merciful hands were wounded for us so we could be made whole. They were pierced through because of our doubts. They bled for our lack of faith. But the owner of those hands is alive! Is it any wonder that Jesus' glorified hands still bore the marks of the nails? What better picture of his mercy could we ever see? What could be greater than the perfect hands of our living Savior made even more glorious by the wounds he bore for us?

GRACIOUS HANDS

Before Thomas saw the powerful, merciful hands of his Lord and God, he heard something even more amazing. "Peace be with you!" Jesus greeted him and his fellow disciples. And Thomas understood what grace was all about. Jesus well could have left Thomas in his doubt and never appeared. That's what the doubter deserved. Jesus could have come with a rebuke and lecture. That's what Thomas had earned. But Thomas heard the word "Peace" from his Lord and God. Nothing could remain the same after Thomas had been touched by the gracious hands and words of his Savior.

Jesus comes to us with the same greeting: "Peace be with you!" Such gracious words put us in good hands—in those pierced, yet glorified, hands of our risen Savior. Like Thomas, we don't deserve to hear such comforting words. We deserve to have Jesus leave us in our sin and ignorance, headed straight down the road to eternal damnation. But our gracious Lord would have none of that. His love for us is too great to allow us to remain at war with his holy Father. Our Savior rose to give us peace.

Jesus showed his strength in allowing his powerful hands to be wounded for us.

Many peace treaties through the years have been sealed in blood—the blood of soldiers giving their lives for their country and its cause. This peace treaty too was sealed in blood, but from only one soldier—from Christ, our freedom fighter. Throughout his life he was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with his enemy, the devil. He never lost as he fought the battle for us. Yet it was this victor, this King, whose hands were bound as a prisoner of war. The only one who was innocent was given the death penalty for our crimes and transgressions. The hands of Jesus dripped precious blood to pay the price for us, that we might raise our hands in joy and praise to God forever. Yes, these hands of our Savior are gracious hands, hands that bring us peace.

When disaster strikes, we want to be in good hands. An insurance company reminds us, "You're in good hands." The company wants us to feel safe and secure, to know that it will take care of us when trouble comes. But no insurance company can give us the peace we need. Only Jesus can bring such peace. Easter puts us into good hands, into the powerful, merciful, and gracious hands of our risen Savior and King. It's no accident that, even in glory, our Savior's hands are marked by the wounds he bore for us. With such wounded, glorified hands, Jesus will take us by the hand into his heavenly kingdom.

Paul Tessmer is pastor at Zion, Winthrop, Minnesota.

GOD SPEAKS:

Prophecy in the New Testament

John C. Jeske

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Biblical prophecy reached its fulfillment in Christ. Whatever preceded that fulfillment was really preliminary—a prologue. What followed that fulfillment is, in a sense, epilogue. That's what we want to trace now, as we observe from Scripture how the march of prophecy concluded.

GOD STANDS BEHIND HIS MESSAGE

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. Yet God gave another testament, a new revelation of his will. This newer testament depicts the most important events in all of history—how God accomplished his great plan for rescuing a world of lost sinners. This new era of prophecy differed from the older era. It extended over a much shorter period of time and focused not on one single nation but on the development of the Christian church.

Since the New Testament recognizes the Old Testament as the foundation for understanding the great events in the life of Christ, the New Testament includes many references to Old Testament prophets and affirms that Old Testament prophecy is authoritative. Peter wrote to the scattered Christians of Asia Minor: "Understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own

interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20,21). The message of the Old Testament prophets is a message from God, binding on all people for all time.

When the New Testament quotes the Lord's voice as uttered by the Old Testament prophets, it often mentions the speaker by name. In just as many instances, however, New Testament writers neglect to name the Old Testament writer, but identify him only as "the prophet." The reader is simply expected to know which prophet is meant.

As we trace the march of prophecy into the New Testament era, we see additional evidence that God stood behind the proclamation of his Word. As his little band of faithful followers testified to his truth in an unfriendly and unbelieving world, God granted the gift of predictive prophecy. During one of the last conversations Jesus had with his disciples on Maundy Thursday evening, he promised them that after his departure the Holy Spirit would reveal further information about God's plans for the future (John 16:13). Some of this advance information would be good news, some would be bad news, but all of it was designed to strengthen that loyal little band. Under God, they had critically important roles to play in preserving the truths of Christianity and in transmitting them to future generations of God's people.

GOD PROCLAIMS HIS TRUTH AND PREDICTS EVENTS

After Saul's conversion, during the year he spent at Antioch with Barnabas, "some prophets came down from Jerusalem



to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world" (Acts 11:28). Why did the Spirit give Agabus such a prophecy? The following verses supply the answer. "The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea . . . sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:29,30). In charting the march of prophecy through the New Testament, it's important to note that a significant development is God's gift of predictive prophecy.

But by far the most common New Testament use of the verb to *prophecy* is to describe the Spirit's gift of preaching the revealed truth of God. St. Paul speaks of this in Romans: "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith" (12:6). Prophecy, then, was a gift given by the Spirit to members of the early church to be used in a way that expressed and maintained the unity of the one body. It was surely such a special gift that enabled Peter, who had presented such a pitiful spectacle in front of a coal fire only weeks earlier, to preach his impressive Pentecost sermon as boldly and as fearlessly as he did.

How did the Spirit give the New Testament prophets the message he wanted them to transmit? He did that in two ways. Paul urged his young coworker Timothy: "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2). New Testament prophets preached messages they received from a careful study of the Word of God. On the other hand, in the early years of the Christian church, prophets often received the messages they were to transmit by direct revelation from God. Prophesying, speaking to edify the church, was an important gift of the Spirit.

The prophet Joel, "the prophet of Pentecost," had predicted: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28,29).

On the pages of the New Testament, we meet Anna, one of the people who met the Christ Child when he was brought

to the temple. She is called "a prophetess." With eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, she saw in Jesus what most Israelites did not and would not see. And with lips opened by the Spirit, Anna gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

Unfortunately, however, it was not only prophets and apostles who saw how good the Spirit's gift of prophecy was. Satan realized that too, and during the New Testament period, he created his counterfeit: false prophets. Evidence of this is scattered across the pages of the New Testament.

When St. Paul listed the grace-gifts with which the Spirit endows his church, he mentioned specifically the ability to distinguish between spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10), the ability to distinguish between God's truth and false doctrine. As a result, God's people are not at the mercy of the one deceiver whom Jesus calls the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

We've now followed the march of prophecy from its beginnings on the early pages of the Old Testament to its fulfillment in Christ and its subsequent development in the Christian church. In place of the Old Testament prophets and a partial Bible, we now have the complete Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Does this mean that we now know everything there is to know about God and about our relationship to him? No. God's wisdom and knowledge are far above what we can understand. Yet we can say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). If you and I can say that, we know all we need to know.

Professor Emeritus John Jeske is a member at St. Luke, Watertown, Wisconsin.

This is the fourth article in a five-part series on prophecy.
Next month: Interpreting prophetic messages today

CONFESSIONS of FAITH



Raised Lutheran, a woman wanders away from her faith only to have the Holy Spirit lead her back to her Lutheran roots.

Jamie Bruen

I was baptized in the Lutheran church my grandparents attended in 1950. I always knew I had been baptized as an infant. My mom had converted to Roman Catholicism before marrying my dad in 1943, and until recently I always thought I had been baptized at my dad's Roman Catholic church.

LUTHERAN ROOTS

My mom was not happy worshiping in the Roman Catholic church, so she began taking me to a Lutheran church. I loved going to Sunday school. My favorite part of the worship service was the children's devotion where I got to go up close and hear what Jesus had to say to me each Sunday.

My dad was a great "Do It Yourselfer," so that was what he would do on Sundays while my mom and I were at church. He would spend time with us on Saturdays, and he was the one who read me my bedtime stories, so I had a lot of quality time with my dad every day.

One Sunday when I was about four years old, as my mom and I were getting ready to head to church, I turned to my dad and asked, "Dad, you do everything with us. Why don't you ever go to church with us?" I didn't know his answer, but the next Sunday, and from then on, he went to church with us. It took five or six years of talks and study with the pastor, but my dad became a Lutheran, a Sunday school teacher, and a church officer. When it was time to build a new church building, he was the project manager and head electrical engineer.

One other person came into my life at an early age. His name is John Bruen. We met in 1959 while our fathers worked together to get community members interested in building a community swim club. John was my shadow. He was always there at swim meets to hold my glasses and my towel, ready

to hand them to me when I finished a race—he was not the competitive type. He had a big crush on me, but I was nine and he was only four.

A QUEST FOR IDENTITY

I went to St. Louis University, met and married my first husband, and had three children. I followed him through a “quest for identity.” This search included studies of Islam, his African-American roots, and his American Indian roots; membership in a Pentecostal church; a trip to Israel; and conversion to Orthodox Judaism after our trip to the Holy Land. But in the end, I became a divorced “Jewish” mother of three.

Years went by. When my parents were ready to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary, I planned a party for them. I invited all their friends, including Bill and Anita Bruen, John’s parents. I didn’t hear from John’s parents, so I gave them a call. Who should answer but John. We got together the next weekend, just to catch up on old times. One year later, we were married.

Raised Roman Catholic, John was not going to church. Neither was I. We did our best and held on to each other as the kids became teenagers. My oldest son had some real problems with drugs, even landing in prison for selling controlled substances at the age of 17. In the throes of withdrawal, he turned to Jesus and began bringing religious tracts and DVDs into our home. He begged John, me, and his siblings to watch with him. We were so grateful for the change in him, but he was really “in your face” about Jesus.

Just about this time, a friend mentioned that she wanted to find a church home. I said, “I think I need to do that too.” The two of us started visiting churches. I found a large Evangelical Free church. But the church service—with 2,000+ in attendance—didn’t work for me. They sang lots of praise music and invited all who claimed Jesus as their Savior to share in a bread and grape juice communion. But the small church group, and in particular a Wednesday morning Bible study group of women, really helped get me back into reading and studying God’s Word. The Holy Spirit began to “complete the work” he had begun at my baptism.

A RETURN TO THE GOSPEL TEACHINGS

Then John’s place of employment moved across the Missouri River, just far enough that we decided to relocate and downsize. Every day on our way to and from this new home, we would pass by the sign for Apostles Lutheran Church. I thought I should visit one time just to see what it was like.

So, the last Sunday in December, I decided to visit. As I was walking in, I noticed a statue of Mary—rather odd for a Lutheran church, I thought. When I got to the top of the steps, I realized they were just renting a Knights of Columbus Hall. I stayed for the service, feeling it would be rude to walk in



John and Jamie Bruen

and just walk out. I read through the worship folder and went back to talk with the usher, saying I understood about closed Communion and that I had been raised Lutheran. He suggested that I not partake that Sunday and said that I should talk with the pastor later on.

I heard the Word preached clearly and heard again about God’s free and full forgiveness. The power of the Holy Spirit carried me back to the welcoming arms of my Savior, Jesus Christ. I yearned to take Communion but understood that I was not ready that Sunday. I had strayed quite far from the pure gospel teaching and needed to get back to the real truth of God’s Word first.

After the service the pastor and I talked. He asked when he could come by and talk more. I told him Mondays were good. He was there the next day. As we talked, it became apparent that I needed to take the Bible information class with him. I suggested that we make it on Monday evenings, when my husband John would be home to sit in with us. I explained that John had been raised Roman Catholic and I just wanted him to know why I was going to join this Lutheran church.

By the end of April, as the three of us gathered for our last Bible study together, I told the pastor that I was ready to become a member. John spoke up and said, “I would like to join also.” I know that I had been praying that someday John and I would go to church together, but we had not even talked about it during all those weeks of classes. We both became members the next month.

We are both so grateful for the truth of God’s Word that we found in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We are most grateful that our one true God is ever faithful and never changing in his pursuit of those he calls to faith. We now devote ourselves to being ready to serve him whenever he places opportunities before us.

Jamie Bruen is a member at Apostles, Dardenne Prairie, Missouri.

Do you have a story to share about how you became a WELS member? Send it to *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@wels.net.

Christ's Love

Jesus' means of grace always work.

John M. Brenner

Things are not always what they seem. Years ago my wife and I purchased some perennials from a mail order nursery. When they arrived, we planted the bare roots according to the directions, but the plants did not grow. Years later, long after we had forgotten about them, the plants sprouted right where we had planted them. All that time the roots that seemed dead had life and produced plants in their own good time.

The proclamation of the gospel can be like that. Sometimes that proclamation does not seem to do anything. Yet the gospel is always alive and life giving.

THE GOSPEL IS GOD'S POWER

The Bible tells us that the gospel is God's power for salvation (Romans 1:16). It is powerful because it is God's Word. You cannot separate God's Word from the Holy Spirit. Whenever God's Word is read or proclaimed, the Holy Spirit will be doing his work of bringing people to faith or strengthening faith.

That does not mean that everyone who hears the gospel will believe. Some will reject that message. When God works *directly* with his almighty power as he did when he created the universe and as he will when he raises all the dead on the Last Day, he cannot be resisted. On the Last Day no one will be able to remain in the grave. However, when the Holy Spirit works *indirectly*, through means, he can be resisted. As our Savior lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, *but you were not willing*" (Matthew 23:37, emphasis added).

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit always works through the means of grace, and the administration of the means of grace will always accomplish what God wants it to accomplish. Our Lord declares, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10,11).

BELIEVERS ARE WHERE THE GOSPEL IS PROCLAIMED

The Lutheran Confessions testify to that truth when they point to the gospel and the sacraments as the marks of the church. "The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly" (Augsburg Confession, Article VII:1, Kolb-Wengert). If the invisible church consists only of believers and we cannot look into anyone's heart to see faith, how do we know where Christians will be found? They will be found wherever the means of grace are being used. The Augsburg Confession adds the words *purely and rightly* to emphasize that the Holy Spirit does not work through error or false doctrine or false sacraments. He works only through the means he himself has established.

We can be confident that Christians are present whenever and wherever we see the marks of the church. As Luther once wrote, "Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that . . . 'a Christian holy people' must be there, even though their number is very small. For God's Word 'shall not return empty,' Isaiah 55. . . . And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word"

God so loved the world that he

(*Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 41, p. 150).

THE HOLY SPIRIT ALWAYS WORKS THROUGH THE MEANS OF GRACE

It is important for us to remember that the means of grace are always efficacious because the Holy Spirit works imperceptibly. Jesus tells us, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). In his parable of the growing seed, our Savior says, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed, sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head,

then the full kernel in the head" (Mark 4:26-28).

We cannot put the Holy Spirit on a timetable or expect him to work according to our schedule. We sow the seed. He produces the results he wants. As Lutherans we confess, "For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith *where and when it pleases God*" (Augsburg Confession, Article V:2, Kolb-Wengert, emphasis added).

Sometimes we cannot see any results from our proclamation of the gospel. At times the church may even seem to disappear. The prophet Elijah thought that he was the only believer left in the entire Northern Kingdom of Israel. God had to reveal to him, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18).

Sometimes the faithful proclamation of God's Word may lead to a visible decline in numbers. After Jesus' great Bread of Life discourse we read, "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching,

Who can accept it?' . . . From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:60,66).

At other times the Holy Spirit may grant amazing visible results. After St. Peter's Pentecost sermon, three thousand were added to the church (Acts 2:41). The wicked city of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:5; see also Matthew 12:41).

The real sign of a dying church is when it no longer treasures the means of grace.

Some seeing the declining numbers in our Wisconsin Synod have lamented that we are a dying church. Declining numbers may or may not indicate a dying church. We draw our life from the means of grace. So long as the gospel is rightly proclaimed in our midst and the sacraments are rightly administered the Holy Spirit is sustaining our life and extending it. The real sign of a dying church is when it no longer treasures the means of grace. A church dies when it no longer proclaims the gospel and administers the sacraments.

The means of grace are always efficacious. We dare never lose confidence in God's power for salvation. Nor can we take the means of grace for granted. Rather, the fact that the Holy Spirit always works through the means of grace will lead us to make faithful use of those means in our lives. That truth will give us confidence to tell others about our Savior. For we know that God's Word will never return to him empty but will always accomplish what he desires.

John Brenner, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin.

This is the fourth article in a six-part series on Christ's love.



gave his one and only Son

A whole new world

Living in Japan taught me many things, including how it is our job as disciples of Christ to spread his good news near and far.

Jamie Hering



In 1989 my parents received a call to Mito City, Japan. I was born three years later in a small hospital down the street from our house.

My parents lived in Japan for ten years. I went to a Japanese kindergarten in the morning and an English Lutheran kindergarten in the afternoon. Hundreds of kids attended the Japanese kindergarten, but the Christian one-room school only had eight kids. In Japan I was always surrounded by kids and teachers talking about Buddha and other gods.

The Japanese school held religious festivals and ceremonies in the back courtyard where the kids played. I watched plays and rituals of teachers dressed as gods chasing demons. I thought it was strange that I was cleansed with "holy" smoke and taught many things about Buddha. I would always go home and tell my parents about the bizarre things that happened at school.

Being an American in a different country has many benefits in the missionary field. When my dad would take my family to the supermarket, crowds of people swarmed us. My brothers and I had blonde hair and big eyes. We looked different from all the other young Japanese children, so they wanted to touch and pet us. This was the perfect opportunity to tell these lost souls the good news of our Savior. Many questions were asked and answered about Christ. Going to the supermarket was not just to buy a ten-pound bag of rice anymore. My parents called my brothers and me "good evangelist tools."

God's hand was with my family in Japan. There were many times I remember being ridiculed for not participating with my friends in little practices that were sinful. I would come home crying because I was made fun of at my Japanese kindergarten. My

two brothers went through the same thing, but they were old enough to attend the Lutheran school full time. I attended the Lutheran school only half a day.

Because of the hardships and persecution my family went through, at times it seemed like God was not with us. But at the end of the day, we would gather together and say prayers of thankfulness. God called my dad to be a pastor in a foreign country for a reason. Through my dad's work, the Holy Spirit converted many Japanese people to believe in the true God. My dad was kind and caring to all the people he talked to even if they refused to listen to him. He traveled up to the highest mountains and biked through the worst weather just to spread God's Word. My dad inspired me to share the good news with my Japanese friends. My brothers and I invited our friends to vacation Bible school and Christmas services we were in. Some of them came back the next Sunday, while others went home and told their parents. God used my family as six little "evangelist tools."

Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:5, "But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardships, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." God must have been saying this to my family when we lived in Japan. It is our responsibility as disciples of Christ to spread his good news near and far. We all need to take some time to tell our neighbors or those we meet randomly at the store about our wonderful Savior, even if the location is in a whole new world.

Jamie Hering, a junior at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at Divine Peace, Garland, Texas.

Obituaries

Ralph O. Muenkel 1920-2009

Ralph Muenkel was born May 28, 1920, in Caledonia, Minn. He died Dec. 7, 2009, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1941 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Sparta, Wis.; Trinity, Manitowoc, Wis.; St. John, Westland, Mich.; First, La Crosse, Wis.; and St. James, Milwaukee, Wis.

He was preceded in death by one son, three brothers, and two sisters. He is survived by his wife, Alice; two sons; one daughter; six grandchildren; and one sister.

Annette C. Whalen 1938-2009

Annette Whalen (née Luisier) was born Nov. 14, 1938, in Town of Spruce, Wis. She died Dec. 22, 2009, in Town of Spruce, Wis.

She taught at Grace, Neenah, Wis.; and Trinity, Neenah, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, George; two sons; one daughter;

seven grandchildren; two brothers; and four sisters.

Friedel C. Schulz 1920-2009

Friedel Schulz was born July 3, 1920, in Saginaw, Mich. He died Dec. 25, 2009, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Trinity, Clear Lake, S.D.; Mt. Zion, Kenosha, Wis.; and Gloria Dei-Bethesda, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Eunice; one son; one daughter; three grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and a brother.

Howard E. Russow 1915-2009

Howard Russow was born March 5, 1915, in Monroe, Mich. He died Dec. 26, 2009, in Harvey, Ill.

A 1939 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at congregations including Zion, Mission, S.D.; Trinity, Union Grove, Wis.; St. Matthew, Iron Ridge, Wis.;

Immanuel, Hadar, Neb.; and St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Lillian. He is survived by 7 sons, 2 daughters, 29 grandchildren, 34 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great-grandchild.

Glenn R. Barnes 1927-2010

Dr. Glenn Barnes was born Nov. 17, 1927, in Eagle Grove, Iowa. He died Jan. 11, 2010, in Mankato, Minn.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Newburg, Wis.; St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He was preceded in death by one brother. He is survived by his wife, Sylvia; two sons; two daughters; six grandchildren; and three sisters.

Frederick Sardon Fallen 1938-2010

Frederick Fallen was born Nov. 20, 1938, in Mankato, Minn. He died Jan. 18, 2010, in Rochester, Minn.

A 1965 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Divinity, Saint Paul, Minn.; St. Paul, Arlington, Minn.; and Grace, South Saint Paul, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Thea; 4 daughters; and 11 grandchildren.

Linda Louise Fuller 1947-2010

Linda Fuller (née Zimont) was born June 19, 1947. She died Jan. 27, 2010, in Tustin, Calif.

She taught at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Arnold. She is survived by one son, four daughters, six grandchildren, and three sisters.

Through my Bible in 3 years



May 2010

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|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Jeremiah 48 | 12. Phil. 1:12-26 | 23. Ezek. 9, 10 |
| 2. Jer. 49:1-33 | 13. Phil. 1:27-2:18 | 24. Ezek. 11 |
| 3. Jer. 49:34-50:46 | 14. Phil. 2:19-30 | 25. Ezek. 12, 13 |
| 4. Jer. 51:1-58 | 15. Phil. 3:1-11 | 26. Ezek. 14, 15 |
| 5. Jer. 51:59-52:34 | 16. Phil. 3:12-21 | 27. Ezek. 16 |
| 6. Lamentations 1 | 17. Phil. 4 | 28. Ezek. 17 |
| 7. Lam. 2 | 18. Ezekiel 1 | 29. Ezek. 18, 19 |
| 8. Lam. 3 | 19. Ezek. 2:1-3:21 | 30. Ezek. 20:1-44 |
| 9. Lam. 4 | 20. Ezek. 3:22-5:17 | 31. Ezek. 20:45-21:32 |
| 10. Lam. 5 | 21. Ezek. 6, 7 | |
| 11. Philippians 1:1-11 | 22. Ezek. 8 | |

Stories from Haiti

In early February, Mark Vance, director of operations for WELS Committee on Relief and Pastor Robert Smith, the chairman of the Administrative Committee for Latin American Missions, traveled to Haiti's neighbor, the Dominican Republic, to explore possibilities for giving spiritual and humanitarian aid to those affected by the Haitian earthquake in January. Smith shares these stories of people he met on the trip:

RONA ABRAHAM



Rona Abraham reaching out to Francisca's mother

Haitian Rona Abraham completed his pastoral training through the seminary program of the Latin America Traveling Theological Educators (LATTE) in 2007. Before the earthquake, Abraham was living in Santiago, Dominican Republic, taking courses at the university toward a degree in civil engineering. His goal was to return to Haiti and support himself with a full-time job, while doing part-time evangelism.

After the earthquake, we met with Abraham, LATTE Professor Phil Strackbein, and two national pastors to determine how best to serve the physical and spiritual needs of the Haitians. During this meeting, the national church, together with the Latin America committee, issued a temporary call to Abraham to take about two months exploring Haiti, especially Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haitien, looking for possibilities for evangelism as well as humanitarian aid. If Abraham reports that the Lord

seems to be opening a door for work in Haiti, he may be asked to return for a longer period to share the gospel message with those who are in need of many things but of Jesus most of all.

We pray that the Lord will bless his exploration (which might be completed by the time you read this) and that the Lord will give him the opportunity he desires to share Jesus with his people.

During the trip, the group visited the Good Samaritan hospital in Jimaní, a city in the Dominican Republic just across the border from Haiti. Because he could speak both French and Creole, the main languages of Haiti, Abraham was able to visit with many of the wounded and hand out copies of The Promise, an illustrated book published by WELS Multi-Language Publications that presents the message of the Bible in simple terms. Here are two of those people:

FRANCISCA



Francisca

Francisca, her mother, and two siblings were sitting on the patio of their house in Port-au-Prince when the ground started rumbling and shaking. The quake brought down a wall of the house, which crushed part of Francisca's ankle. Since there was no immediate medical help available in Port-au-Prince, her mother took her to the Good Samaritan hospital in Jimaní. There she had surgery to re-

pair her ankle. When we visited her in the hospital, she was being treated for an infection.

For now, Francisca and her mother have food and shelter while she recovers at the hospital. Where they will go after this remains uncertain. At the time of the interview, her father and two siblings were still living on the streets of Port-au-Prince.

When they lived in Haiti, they attended a Pentecostal church. It's unknown if this church is still there. Abraham gave them a copy of *The Promise*. After all, despite Francisca's great need for medical care, food, and shelter, her greatest need—and ours as well—is the forgiveness of sins in Jesus.

MACKINSON



Mackinson in his makeshift tent

Mackinson, a motorcycle taxi driver, had almost recovered from a broken leg he suffered in a motorcycle accident six months before the earthquake. On the day of the earthquake, when the ground started trembling, Mackinson began to run for his life. This put too much pressure on the bone healing in his leg, which broke again, sending Mackinson crashing to the ground. Unlike Francisca, he didn't reach the hospital in Jimaní until a few days later. There the doctors treated his leg and put it in a traction device.

New chapel to be dedicated at MLC

When we met Mackinson, he was staying with his wife outside the hospital in a makeshift tent made out of bedsheets. Others were living in shacks made out of cardboard. When we saw this, we understood why the regional emergency director had told us that he was glad it had not rained for a few days.

Mackinson and his wife have one child, whom they sent to the Haitian countryside to live with a grandmother. Mackinson would like to stay in Jimani after he recovers. We learned later that this is not likely. On the day we were there, all the able-bodied Haitians were being given two choices: they could board a bus back to Fond Parissienne, Haiti, and they would be given a tent, food, and a packet of supplies. The other choice involved a free ride back to Haiti, courtesy of the Dominican Republic immigration officials.

Mackinson also received a copy of *The Promise* from Abraham. Jesus is the only certainty there is for Mackinson and the other Haitians at the Good Samaritan hospital. He is our only certainty as well.

Robert Smith

Two groups of volunteers—consisting of medical professionals—traveled to Jimani in March to help treat victims of the Haiti earthquakes. Look for articles about these trips in future issues of *Forward in Christ*. Get the latest news about WELS work in Haiti at www.wels.net/haiti.

Monetary gifts to support the physical and spiritual needs of Haitians can be sent to WELS Committee on Relief. Designate Haiti earthquake and mail to WELS Committee on Relief, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. Donate online at www.wels.net/give.

The heartbeat of the campus. A powerful visual statement. The fiber and culture of the campus. A premiere worship classroom. A visible gospel.

Each of these descriptions has been given to the new Chapel of the Christ at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn. Standing at the center of campus between two of the busiest buildings, "the chapel will proclaim Christ in worship, music, and art," says John Boeder, MLC's campus pastor.

Completed in March, the chapel will be dedicated the weekend of Apr. 10–11. The \$7.5 million chapel and organ were funded from designated gifts given as part of the synod's 150th anniversary thank offering in 2000, from individual gifts for the chapel since that time, and from interest earned on those gifts. "The Chapel of the Christ really belongs to the Christian folk of WELS," Mark Zarling, MLC's president, says. "Their prayers and generous thank offerings to Jesus made this church building a reality."

Throughout the years, various buildings were constructed to accommodate worship on campus, but none served that sole purpose. Since 1928, the campus family has worshiped in the same auditorium that houses concerts, drama productions, sports rallies, talent shows, and more. "Wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, the Spirit is unleashed," Zarling reflects. "But now there is a visible and dedicated place that reminds campus family and campus visitors alike that Christ is the center of our identity, both as individual Christians and as a college."

Gunnar Lederman, MLC's student body president, comments that the construction of this chapel and other prominent WELS church buildings is like "putting the gospel on a stand where it is able to shine and do its work."

Pastor Philip Casmer, a 2003 MLC

graduate, agrees. "The Chapel of the Christ provides a beautiful place to experience God's grace in Word and sacrament on a daily basis for a student body that trains to minister with them full time," he says. "It is a place in which excellent worship will be modeled for those who will be leaders in worship places all across the country."

Every day, morning and evening, the campus family will gather to hear God's Word in the Chapel of the Christ. "In addition, it will be open for students, staff, and faculty to find some quiet moments during hectic days to sit and pray and ponder the goodness of our Savior-God," Zarling says. He also anticipates the chapel being used by larger gatherings of WELS Christians for conventions, conferences, and festival services. "And yes," Zarling continues, "already there are students who are planning to have their weddings sanctified by Word and prayer using the Chapel of the Christ."

"Worshiping our Savior and being strengthened by the means of grace is the heartbeat and highlight of campus life," says Boeder. "This new chapel will



The Chapel of the Christ

enhance what we already do and enjoy. Through the means of grace, our God will feed us for our important privilege of taking his Word into the world through the public ministry."

For more information about the dedication of the Chapel of the Christ on Apr. 10–11, go to www.mlc-wels.edu. Can't make it to the dedication? Watch the Apr. 10 service streamed live at www.wels.net/streams/live.

QUESTION & ANSWER with Mark Hayes, home missionary

Learn more about the WELS home mission congregation in Pueblo West, Colo., and what home mission work is all about from Mark Hayes, pastor at Crown of Life, Pueblo West.

Q What was your reaction when you were assigned in 1998 to start a church in Pueblo West, Colo.?

A I couldn't have been happier. I had been a vicar in Colorado and longed to get back. After all the dust cleared, I realized how daunting it was to start a church from the ground up. While completely recognizing that God was in control, I couldn't help but feel inadequate to be in that position.

Q Was there a core group already established?

A Yes, there was a core group, but not in the way that you would normally define one. Pueblo West is located about 10 miles west of Pueblo. Grace was an established WELS church in Pueblo. Although some members of Grace lived in Pueblo West, they were not depending on the new church in Pueblo West for a place of worship, as is common with many core groups. They had a place to worship but were willing to make the shift to Pueblo West once the new church got going.

Q What were the first things that you did to begin organizing the church?

A Before we could be a part of the community as a church, we needed to find out what the community was like. My wife and I tried to get to community events, getting to know people the best we could. I began going door-to-door with a religious survey, asking for people's opinions about church and gathering a list of people who might be interested in a Bible study. That's where it is great to have any kind of core group, because they have lived there and know people. The best way to get people to try your church is by invitations from friends, family, or coworkers. Even with all the religious surveys I did, references from the core group were still the strongest prospects.

Q What are the highlights of Crown of Life's history?

A August 1999—Our first vacation Bible school (VBS) was held in the school where we would meet for the next ten years. The Ecumenical Church canceled its VBS that same day, and many families came to ours, which was right down the street. We met some new families who were very interested in our new church. They also knew a lot of people and were influential in bringing more people to church. We started our first larger Bible information class.

September 1999—Held our first worship service at Sierra Vista Elementary School.

January 2000—Upgraded from "exploratory" to "mission" status. In other words, we were no longer just trying it out and seeing if starting a church was viable. The synod was convinced that we were making headway and could become an established congregation.

2002—Received "land search authority." The Board for Home Missions saw enough forward progress that it encouraged us to look for sites for our new facility.

2004—Received "facility planning authority." Home Missions gave us permission to begin planning our first worship facility.

2006—Purchased a site that we would be able to build on, with the help of WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.

2007—Combined with Grace in Pueblo to make one church family in Pueblo West.

Oct. 5, 2008—Dedicated the new worship facility.

Q Describe the ups and downs of being involved in a home mission.

A The hardest part was working

Continuing education refreshes and challenges called workers

Progress is being made toward addressing a resolution from the 2009 synod convention designed to encourage continuing education among called workers. The Conference of Presidents has reestablished a committee to coordinate a comprehensive, yet flexible, continuing education program. Several grants have been secured to help fund the manpower needed to make this coordination possible.

As the synod takes steps to encourage continuing education, many congregations already recognize the value of

lifelong learning for their called workers. Members at Immanuel, Greenville, Wis., give their pastors—David Scharf and Joel Heckendorf—time off every year to attend conferences and workshops as well as more in-depth classes during the summer at the seminary. Money is budgeted to pay for many of these courses.

"We want to encourage our pastors to grow in their knowledge and faith in Christ, just like we would encourage all our other members to do the same," says Bob Schroeder, Immanuel's Board of Elders chairman.

Bob Starner, the congregation's president, says continuing education also gives their pastors and teachers knowledge of changes in methods for preaching and teaching. "We need to reinforce the concept that growing in knowledge is a good thing versus 'I'm okay with what I already know,'" he says.

Heckendorf and Scharf take advantage of these opportunities to grow both spiritually and professionally. "It's important to refresh yourself," says Scharf. "It's hard work, but it's a different kind of work—a refreshing work and a new challenge."

with a city that was not very interested in churches. To be fair, they weren't against churches because of religion. They just weren't going to go out of their way to help churches because of their tax exempt status. If they put us on a commercial site, they'd lose the revenue. The neighbors did not want a church in residential areas. I can't count how many times we went to a city board meeting to ask for a variance to build a church in a residential area only to listen to a group of "would be" neighbors describe what a nuisance it would be to have us there.

However, to finally be in a quality facility where we just welcomed 13 new families to our congregation in one year and where we see new faces almost every week makes it all worth it.

Q Describe where Crown of Life is at now.

A We currently are a congregation of 150 communicants (200 souls). We have a steady flow of guests on Sunday and an active Bible information class. We are really focusing heavily on member involvement. We want to integrate all these new people into the church family, but we want to make sure that the people who have



Mark Hayes with his wife, Sara, and their three children.

been here for awhile don't get forgotten in the process. We are working on finding areas of service for everyone as well as making sure that there are activities for every age group.

Q Anything else you'd like to share?

A Crown of Life benefited from ten years of unloading and setting up chairs in a school gymnasium. We learned the discipline of proclaiming the truth and being friendly and welcoming in a very average worship environment. We learned to trust God and become a family ourselves.

When we finally did get a new facility, people were interested in it. But what we had built the ten years prior is more solid than the building itself. Within that new facility is a family that has been built around God's Word with an appreciation for every blessing he brought along the way.

If you build a church building, they may come. If you build a warm and friendly church family around the Word, they will stay.

After taking three courses at the seminary last summer, Heckendorf says that he immediately was able to apply what he learned. "When you're right out of college and going into seminary, it's all theoretical," he says. "It's so nice to be able to go back with experience behind you, having applications in mind."

Both Heckendorf and Scharf also appreciate the interaction with other pastors attending classes. "Half of the fun of Summer Quarter is getting to talk with the other pastors," says Scharf. "You are encouraged in your ministry as well as you get to grow from their insights."

He continues, "I'm thrilled that we've been blessed with a congregation that supports that work, and I've been blessed with an associate who wants to grow professionally as much as I do."

More than a thousand called workers participated in continuing education courses through Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., last summer. According to Paul Prange, administrator for the Board for Ministerial Education, off-campus opportunities—whether through seminars or distance-learning—are also grow-

ing in popularity. "Iron sharpens iron," he says. "When people of the same fellowship gather around the Word of God, the Holy Spirit works."

To learn more about the importance of continuing education, watch the April *WELS Connection* after Apr. 1 at www.wels.net/welsconnection.

Apache mission emphasizes member involvement

Time and circumstances have changed WELS mission work among the Apache people of Arizona, the oldest of all WELS mission fields. Ten years ago, 25 missionaries and teachers ministered to Apaches on two reservations. Today, there are 15 workers. Subsidy from WELS has been reduced to one-fifth of what it was ten years ago. The high school has closed, programs have been cut back, and many buildings remain old and run-down.

But positive things are happening. "We've come a long way in ten years," says Missionary Dan Rautenberg. "We have church councils who can discipline each other. Our offerings are up hundreds of percents. Spiritually mature Apaches teach in our schools, preach from our pulpits, and even bring God's Word to other tribes. God has really been blessing us."

In order to continue this 115-year-old ministry despite financial difficulties, "we have to look at different models to get things done," says Rautenberg. "We have to continue to find the doors that God is opening."

Many of these doors involve getting more Native Americans involved in ministry—either as called workers or

lay leaders. "We can't do everything that we'd like to do," says Rautenberg. "But we need to get in there, see who the Lord has chosen, raise them up, and then let them take care of their church, their way."

The Apache Christian Training School (ACTS) is where these leaders are trained. Started 11 years ago mainly to train future called workers, the program now concentrates on getting congregation members—and even people from the community—more into God's Word. As people progress through the classes, they learn how to put their faith into action through congregational service—doing things like teaching Sunday school, serving as elders, or visiting fellow Christians. "If we can't pay one person to do everything, we need to get everybody to do something," says Rautenberg, the director of the ACTS program.

More than 60 men and women are taking classes through the school. Many are in the first level, preparing to be congregational lay leaders. Seven men are taking more specific, upper-level courses to become evangelists or pastors. "I'm teaching everything from Bible basics to beginning Greek," says Rautenberg. "But in the end it's doing

whatever people need. If God puts the desire in them to do something more, then it's my job to work out a plan with them and get them going."

Raising up Apache lay leaders offers many benefits. "It's hard to even describe how many barriers go down when a Native American goes to another Native American," says Rautenberg. It also will help the five parish pastors maintain personal contact with the more than three thousand members and countless prospects in the mission field.

A grant from the state of Arizona allows Rautenberg to work with Rick Loewen of CrossTrain Ministries, a self-supporting ministry and subsidiary of CrossWalk, Phoenix, Ariz, that focuses on strengthening people spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Together they are helping those within the Apache community who are struggling with substance abuse by reaching out with the gospel and building spiritual support groups.

"We are going somewhere," says Rautenberg. "God's Word is still breaking through walls and doing things you wouldn't believe."

Meet some of the students from the ACTS program on the Potluck page (p. 27).



ACTS students, missionaries, and others on the top of Mount Baldy in June 2009.

District news

SOUTH ATLANTIC

More than two hundred people gathered on Jan. 24 for the dedication of the new church building of **Risen Savior, Lakewood Ranch, Fla.**

SOUTH CENTRAL

Holy Cross, Oklahoma City, Okla., has opened a daughter congregation in Norman, Okla.

WESTERN WISCONSIN

The kindergarten classroom of **Trinity, Marshfield, Wis.,** was chosen as the class of the week by WOAW TV 9 in Wausau on Feb. 12.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On Jan. 19, The Lutheran Home Association (TLHA) recognized the **Buelow family**—Sharyn, Randy, Andrew, and Shaynna—as one of two recipients of its *Care of the Soul Leadership Award* for 2010. The Buelows are members of St. Paul, Milwaukee, Wis. The Buelows were selected for their work in TLHA Jesus Cares Ministries (JCM), an outreach ministry to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

On Jan. 13, CNN interviewed a teacher and two students from **Hope Christian School, Milwaukee, Wis.,** about an educational video sixth-graders at

Hope developed based on Beyonce's hit song "Single Ladies." The Hope version is called "Scholar Ladies" and can be viewed at www.youtube.com.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

D-M—On Sept. 20, 2009, **Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.,** celebrated the 25th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of D.T. Rawerts.

SEW—January marked the five-year anniversary of a weekly contemporary worship service at **St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.** The service has proven itself to

be both an effective outreach method as well as an opportunity for members to worship with traditional WELS doctrine in a contemporary environment. The worship band **Glorious Dei** is an active participant in the services.

WW—Members of **St. Michael, Fountain City, Wis.,** are celebrating the congregation's 150th anniversary throughout this year.

The district reporters for this month are: **D-M**—Wayne Rouse; **SA**—Christopher Kruschel; **SC**—William Gabb; **SEW**—Scott Oelhafen; **WW**—Brett Brauer.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., and Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., cosponsored a 13-day "In the Footsteps of St. Paul" study tour to Greece and Turkey in January. Participants visited sites such as Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. The group is pictured touring Athens, Greece.

WELS news briefs

COMMISSION ON ADULT DISCIPLESHIP

414-256-3278; carolyn.sachs@wels.net

Registration is now open for the second **National WELS Women's Leadership Conference.** Held at Wisconsin

Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., the 2010 conference is scheduled for July 16–18. Registration will take place from March 1 to June 15. Early registration, which costs \$110, runs through May 15. As of May 16, the registration cost will be \$130.

The conference theme, "Leading with a Christ-like attitude," is based

on Philippians 2:1–16. Three breakout sessions allow time for practical lessons in women's ministry. Topics include "Evaluating Bible studies," "Defining your leadership style," and "Encouraging emerging leaders." The conference also

includes general sessions, worship, fellowship, and performances by both Koine and United Voices of Praise.

The leadership conference is sponsored by WELS Women's Ministry Committee, which serves under WELS Ministry Support Group's Adult Discipleship. For more information, visit www.wels.net/women.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Baerbock, Ronald E.**, to retirement
Frey, Aaron C., to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Kelm, Paul E., to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.
Lutschaw, Mark T., to Bethel, Bay City, Mich.
Oetsankeh, Mark D., to Trinity, Winslow, Ariz.
Wagenknecht, Myrl F., to St. Thomas, Phoenix, Ariz.
Winter, Ronald L., to retirement

Teachers

- Guelker, Brigetta K.**, to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.
Krenke, Suzanne A., to Zion, Valentine, Neb.
Schwartz, Angela R., to Grace, Kenai, Alaska
Seeger, Rebecca A., to Good Shepherd, Midland, Mich.
Sinn, Karen E., to Immanuel, Salem, Ore.
Sprengler, Mark P., to retirement
Thiesfeldt, Gregory D., to St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.
Van Brocklin, Frank C., to St. Peter, Dorr, Mich.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Fountain City, Wis.**—St. Michael (150). Apr. 11. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; potluck to follow. June 13. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Oct. 3. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. RSVP requested. Elroy Conrad, elroy.conradt@gmail.com.
Milwaukee, Wis.—St. Peter (150). Apr. 25. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow at Serb Hall. RSVP requested. Elaine Metoxin, 414-764-8847.
Morenci, Mich.—Trinity (60). May 16. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. Ralph Stuebs, 517-458-3089.
Paradise/Carson, N.D.—St. John (100). July 25. Worship, 11 A.M.; meal to follow. Wayne Rouse, wrouse@westriv.com.
Cortland (formerly Firth), Neb.—St. John (125). Sept. 12. Worship, 10:45 A.M.; meal to follow. 402-989-4775.
Mandan, N.D.—Redeemer (75). Sept. 26. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; noon meal; presentation to follow. Anniversary worship, 2 P.M. David Hein, 701-663-5344; redeemerman dan@hotmail.com.

COMING EVENTS

- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus Easter tour**—262-242-8100
 • Mar. 31, 7:30 P.M., St. Paul, Moline, Ill.
 • Apr. 1, 7 P.M., Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan.
 • Apr. 2, 7 P.M., Calvary, Dallas, Tex.
 • Apr. 3, 7 P.M., Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Tex.
 • Apr. 4, 10:45 A.M., Holy Word, Austin,

Tex.; 4 P.M., Cross of Christ, Universal City, Tex.

- Apr. 5, 7 P.M., Victory of the Lamb, Katy, Tex.
- Apr. 6, 7 P.M., Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.
- Apr. 7, 7 P.M., Grace, Scroggins, Tex.
- Apr. 8, 7 P.M., Holy Cross, Oklahoma City, Okla.
- Apr. 9, 7 P.M., Grace, Lowell, Ark.
- Apr. 10, 7:30 P.M., St. Mark, Normal, Ill.
- Apr. 11, 10:30 A.M., Peace, Loves Park, Ill.; 3:30 P.M., Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis.

WELS National Choral Festival—Apr. 9–11. Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz. Includes 21 WELS high schools from around the nation. Apr. 9, 7 P.M., pops concert. Apr. 11, 7 P.M., sacred concert. Jon Pasbrig, 602-268-8686, ext. 32; pasbrig@alacoyotes.org.

Chapel of the Christ dedication weekend—Apr. 10–11. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 877-652-1995; mlcinfo@mlc-wels.edu. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.

Christ Empowered Opportunities men's workshops—Theme: "Fearless faith."

- Apr. 17. St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis. Brian Arthur Lampe, 414-915-3211; Brianandtracey@tds.net.
 - May 22. St. John, Frontenac, Minn. Pastor Christopher Hoppe, 651-345-2577.
- Note: In the Milwaukee area, there are also monthly "Grill Kings" barbecues. Brian Lampe, Brianandtracey@tds.net.

Wind Symphony spring concert—Apr. 17, 7:30 P.M. Wittenberg Collegiate Center Chapel Auditorium, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221; mlcinfo@mlc-wels.edu

Gala V "Prep Around the World"—Apr. 17, 5 P.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 920-262-8104; events@lps.wels.net. Web site, www.lps.wels.net.

WELS regional handbell festivals—Apr. 17–18. Each festival concludes with a festival concert on Apr. 18, 2 P.M. Web site, www.welsbells.com.

- Northeast region, Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.
- Southeast region, Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.
- Western region, St. John, Lewiston, Minn.

WELS Conference of Staff Ministers—Apr. 23–24. St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis. Marilyn Miller, 281-444-5894; MarilynMiller@aol.com.

WELS Church Librarian's Organization spring conference—Apr. 24. St. Paul, Brownsville, Wis. Speaker, Sarah Malchow. Registration deadline, Apr. 14. Carol, 920-922-6650; cleonard40@gmail.com.

WELS Wisconsin Choral Festival—Apr. 25, 3 P.M., Immanuel, Medford, Wis. Featuring area WELS church choirs and choral groups. Tim

Jari, 715-748-9635; timjim@tds.net. Web site, www.diedforme.com and click on choir link.

2010 district conventions—Contact your district secretary for more information.

Arizona-California—June 14–16.

Arizona Golf Resort, Mesa, Ariz.

Dakota-Montana—June 8–10. Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.

Michigan—June 8–10. Michigan

Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Minnesota—June 15–17. Martin

Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Nebraska—June 14–16. Nebraska

Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

North Atlantic—June 8–9. Resurrec-

tion, Chesapeake, Va.

Northern Wisconsin—June 13–15. Fox

Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton,

Wis.

Pacific Northwest—June 17–18. Ever-

green Lutheran High School, Des Moines,

Wash.

South Atlantic—June 14–16. Holiday

Inn, Indian Rocks Beach, Fla.

South Central—June 7–8. Calvary,

Dallas, Tex.

Southeastern Wisconsin—June 8–9.

Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwau-

kee, Wis.

Western Wisconsin—June 6–8. Luther

Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

47th annual Lutheran Women's Mission-

ary Society (LWMS) convention—June

24–27. Millennium Hotel, St. Louis, Mo.

Web site, www.lwms.org.

National WELS Women's Leadership Con-

ference—July 16–18. Wisconsin Lutheran

Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Registration, Mar.

1–May 15, \$110; May 16–June 15, \$130.

414-256-3278, carolyn.sachs@wels.net.

Web site, www.wels.net/women.

JOB OPPORTUNITY

Director of information technology—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Read a position description at www.mlc-wels.edu/home/newsworthy/postechdiropen. Diane Brutlag, 507-354-8221; brutlad@mlc-wels.edu.

NAMES WANTED

Norman, Okla.—Worship on Sundays, 1 P.M. Site, Embassy Suites on 24th Ave. John Strackbein, 405-691-2571.

SERVICE TIMES

Bella Vista, Ark.—Worship on Sundays, 9:30 A.M. Beautiful Savior, 626 W. Lanchashire Blvd. 479-855-7853. Web site, www.beautifulsaviorwels.org.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

Picture this

Dear Easter bunny do you no Jesus he is the one and only son of God. ITS hard to under stand but the holy spirit God and Jesus are the same person. ~~Jesus~~ Jesus died on a cross. But on Easter Sunday herose. ~~That~~ That is what Easter is all about. But you can still give peopl Easter eggs and pink milk and all of that stuff Just remember the story I told you and Jesus is are savior for ~~human~~ real. circol yes or no if you beleve in the savior. andrite yes or no. Yes Yes!

Kyah Bratz, a second-grader at St. Paul, Muskego, Wis., wrote the pictured letter to the Easter bunny.

Submitted by Dennis Bratz



Send pictures to Picture this, Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

MEET YOUR APACHE BROTHERS AND SISTERS

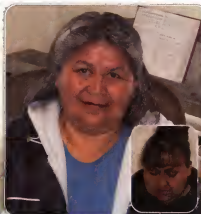
More than 60 people are attending classes through the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS) in East Fork, Ariz. Below are a few of those students. To learn more about the Apache Christian Training School, turn to p. 24.



By the power of the Word, Herbert and Belva Henry have resisted the pressure to follow the traditional religion and are faithful to Jesus. They are committed to the church and have been active in leading other people to come to church and ACTS classes.



Francis Lewis, who is working toward being an evangelist, is able to read sermons in church. His wife, Bonnie, was a public school teacher who worked with ACTS so she could teach kindergarten at East Fork Lutheran School.



Dorothy Endfield and her daughter Michelle Cromwell have been coming to ACTS classes for more than two years. They came to the church during a dark time in their lives. "[Their] smiles come out when we talk about Jesus' love and how he takes care of us because they are living proof of God's love and care," says Dan Rautenberg, ACTS director.



Gregg Henry lives 50 miles away in Cibecue. ACTS classes are held one night a week there, and Henry drives a carload of people to East Fork twice a week for classes. Henry wants to become an evangelist in the church and a Christian leader in the community.

Even in an age of e-mail, God's law still guides us. Follow this imaginary conversation between a granddaughter and grandfather that shows us how God's law applies to all generations.

Dear Grandpa,

Remember Samantha? She's the cheerleader you encouraged me to befriend after she had an abortion. Life's not going so well for Sam. The other cheerleaders won't hang out with her anymore. Even worse, they make fun of her—to her face and behind her back. She's thinking about transferring to another school; she's already quit the cheerleading team. I try to be a friend and be there for her. We talk about Jesus' love for her. She's even come with me to church a couple times. I stick up for her when others say hateful things. But that's hard because then they say mean things to me. Any suggestions?

I love you,
Denali

The Eighth

The Eighth Commandment:

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.

Dear Denali:

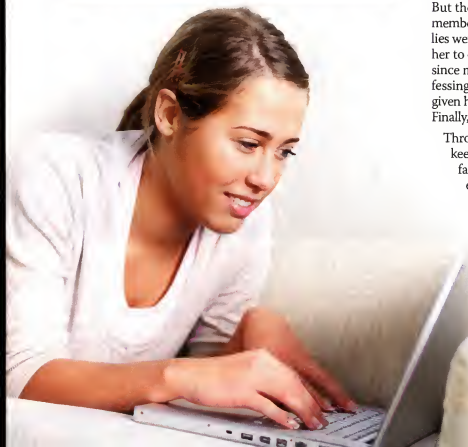
You are in a hard place. But I know God put you there. Our Savior is giving you a chance to show what his grace is and how it helps you deal with Samantha, cheerleaders, and everyone else. Let me start with a story of my own.

I had a friend at church who treated some of her company's money as though it was her own. She took tens of thousands of dollars over several years. Then she got caught. People at church found it hard to believe. She had always been thoughtful and kind. She was respected in our congregation. But there was no mistake; she admitted her crime. Some members openly accused her of being a hypocrite. Two families went to another congregation because my church allowed her to continue to be a member. That was a strange reaction since my friend had written a letter to the congregation confessing her sin and holding on to the forgiveness Jesus had given her. But gossip spread and infected more and more ears. Finally, my friend left for another church.

Through all of this your grandmother and I made sure to keep in touch with her. The three of us went out for breakfast a few times. We e-mailed and talked on the phone. I especially remember the pain she felt because it seemed as if all her Christian friends had deserted her. "It's like I have leprosy," she said.

At about that same time, I had a conversation with a member at church who said, "I'm ashamed that she belongs here. She's given us a bad name all over town." I tried to point out that every member in our church is in need of forgiveness. In that way all of us are no different than my friend. And like that friend, we all find forgiveness in Jesus.

"So next you'll tell me I shouldn't talk about that thief," he said. "Hey, I haven't



Commandment

James A. Aderman

said anything wrong. She stole from her employer. That's the truth. The truth can't be gossip."

"Yes, what she did does give us a bad name," I answered. "But now is the time for us to rally around our friend, to show her our Father's love and acceptance. She won't be in a position to handle money again, but we can forgive her and help her move on."

"Has she paid you to say that?" was the retort. That person hasn't talked to me since. I guess I caught my friend's leprosy.

You know, for a while I was upset with him. Then I began to realize the times I have treated others like that. I have gossiped. I haven't given people the benefit of the doubt. I've assigned the worst motives to what they've said rather than deciding to think the best. Those are all Eighth Commandment sins. And they come so effortlessly. Of course, that doesn't make them lesser sins.

The perfect God holds us to the highest standards. Our sinful natures make it so easy for us to use our words to destroy someone else. When we use words to tear others down rather than build them up, we break God's commandment. We can even violate this commandment by telling the truth. Every time we use the truth to hurt someone, we are not following God's will.

That's why I understand when you say sticking by Samantha is hard. I know how easily gossip slips out from between my teeth. I know how important it is to gossipers that we join in with them. And I know how refusing to join in or, worse, pointing out their sin can rile them all the more.

Here's what has helped me. When I'm tempted to tear someone down, I try to remember the great forgiveness I have from Jesus. I remember how he forgives when I stumble and fall. I don't deserve his forgiveness, but he gives it to me. I try to say words that demonstrate how God has forgiven me. That doesn't mean I ignore sin. At times Christians must confront the sin of others—even gossip—and condemn it. But when a sinner needs forgiveness, I want to be first in line to offer it.

God says the believer "who covers over an offense promotes love" (Proverbs 17:9). In fact, the Bible urges us, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

God makes it clear what kind of love he wants from us. "It is not rude, . . . keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:5-7). Whenever we defend others against verbal assaults, whenever we speak well of them and take

their words and actions in the kindest possible way, we are living an example of God's love for us.

There's only one way to even come close to that kind of love. That's understanding and trusting in the boundless love of Jesus for us. His love covered over my sins, painting them away in his blood. If I am forgiven, then I possess a love that helps me love others, forgive them, and support them when they stumble. His love also provides courage to confront the angry faces, threatened fights, and snubbing of gossipers.

Keep your focus on what Jesus did for you and please, please continue to show and share with Samantha God's commitment to her. Support her; defend her; speak up for her. Help her rebuild her reputation and status. Tell her why God's grace prompts you to do that. There's where worship and your youth group could help. It might also help to rally other Christians around her.

None of that will stop the hurt of the verbal sticks and stones others may fling in your direction. But, Denali, treasure this: our risen and ruling Savior promises, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

I love you!

Grandpa

James Aderman is pastor at Fairview, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This is the ninth article in a ten-part series on the Ten Commandments.



A fearless FAITH

After learning that her daughter was a victim of spousal abuse, a mother lets her faith and joy in the Lord show as she fights for victims' rights.

Linda R. Buxa



In 2006, Cherry Simpson and her husband, Larry, found out that their daughter Regan was the victim of spousal emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.

A DAUGHTER'S STORY

For seven years, Regan lived through a cycle of abuse. She stayed for a number of reasons, many of which are familiar to those trapped by abusers. Mainly she stayed so she could always watch over her sons.

But one night after they attended a wedding together, Regan's husband handcuffed, raped, and beat her so violently that she was hospitalized. From her hospital bed, she signed papers to press charges. He was indicted for aggravated sexual assault, unlawful restraint, and aggravated domestic battery. Cherry says Regan views the crime as God's way of rescuing her: "It was because of the crime she was able to escape the abuse."

But escaping meant dealing with never-ending court and custody battles, leaving her lifelong home because of continued threats, and starting a new life in another state. "Though she knows God has kept her and her children safe thus far, she still struggles with many fears and worries. She will always look over her shoulder," says Cherry.

A MOTHER'S PAIN

The crime affected Cherry as well. "When my child became a victim of crime, I became extremely afraid. I shook. I had to see a doctor because I couldn't stop crying," says Cherry. She wasn't sure how people would react, so she tried to hide.

Cherry's pastor understood and offered support, but she still was afraid to go to church. Every time she went, she cried. "If someone saw me crying they would ask what was wrong. I would be faced with having to tell them," she explains. "What would they think?"

Then she remembered the story of Hannah in the Bible. Humiliated by her

situation, Hannah went to church and cried before the Lord. "She made me realize church is exactly where I needed to be—and it's okay to cry," says Cherry.

When Cherry went back to church, she tried to be discrete about her tears. "One time my husband looked at the stone floor and leaned over to ask, 'Where's all the water coming from?' He thought there was a leak. Then he looked at me and realized I was the leak," she says.

A MOTHER'S FAITH

In the middle of her tears, Cherry found the strength to move forward. "I know my strength comes from his Word," she says. Cherry started to see Bible stories in a different light. She had read the story of the flood before, but after the crime, "I saw that Noah was surrounded by violence for 120 years and still he did what God wanted him to do," she says. She used to think Paul was singing in prison because he was full of faith and joy. "Now I see he did it because he needed to be reminded of God's promises, and it strengthened his faith," she says.

She also used the Bible to help her pray. Immediately after the crime, "I was 'catastrophizing'—thinking of the worst possible scenario. My prayers became depressing, so instead I started looking for verses and prayers that would be uplifting," she says. "Those prayers help me overcome deadly fear."

Yet, for all her confidence in God's love, there still is fear. Her former son-in-law will be released from prison this year. "It's possible he could again harm my daughter and grandchildren," she says. "I don't know that he won't keep his promise to hurt them or take them from us."

In addition to dealing with her fear, she helps her seven- and nine-year-old grandsons cope with theirs. One night, as Cherry was doing devotions, one said, "I don't want to grow up to be like my daddy."

How do you comfort these boys, who were afraid of their abusive father? Cherry told him, "You know, Mary

was the mother of God because God had a plan for her, and it had nothing to do with who her parents were. And he's got a plan for you too."

Her grandson said, "I know God has a plan for you, Nana. To take care of us." "Those are moments of hope that I cherish," she says, "even though they were brought about by extreme fear."

These circumstances could paralyze Cherry with fear. Instead, she has found a fearless faith. "I'm not going to let Satan steal my joy in the middle of this fear," she says.

A MOTHER'S QUEST

This faithful determination has been a witness to everyone Cherry has met. As she helped Regan navigate the trials and legal battles, Cherry started speaking out for victims—through conversations with politicians, a blog, and radio interviews. Cherry does what she can, but she can't do it all. She has suggestions for believers and churches.

- Put the sin in the Son-light. To Cherry, this means telling the truth. "Sin lives in the dark. Many criminals hide their crimes. We should never keep a secret that would help the abuser to sin. In love you should tell," she explains. "It takes the power away from Satan and the criminal."
- Listen to the victim's story. A writer for the *Chicago Tribune* spent months with Regan and chronicled the struggle. "By her talking to the *Tribune*, it helped others and took away her abuser's power," she says. Not all victims have such a public forum, but telling one person can be healing.
- Offer understanding and compassion. "Victims of crime are ripe for hearing God's Word. They long for his love and support. They need respect, encouragement, and hope. Always point them to Christ and remind them no one is defined by being a victim," she says. "We are defined by God's grace and forgiveness."



Cherry and her daughter Regan.

- Do not blame the victim. Even victims blame themselves, asking why they weren't good enough or why they married a criminal. "But no one asked Holocaust survivors, 'What brought you to this concentration camp?'" Cherry says. "The blame for the crime falls squarely on the shoulders of the criminal."
- Provide resources and coping skills. Send a card. Pray with him or her. Sit with him or her in court. If the person lives far away, contact the nearest church and arrange a visit. Cherry has mailed books on grief from Northwestern Publishing House to those who are hurting.
- Start a ministry at your church. Cherry would like to have a Bible study or Web site that addresses being a victim of crime but hasn't found one yet. "I am always amazed at the number of prison ministries I see," says Cherry, who had been a prisoner in pen for almost ten years. "But have you ever heard of a ministry for victims and their families?"

Cherry admits she'd prefer to go back to the naïveté she had before her own life was radically changed by crime. But she can't change the past. Instead, she reaches out to victims with God's love, hope, and encouragement. That's how she's changing the future.

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Why do you play the games you do?

Paul T. Prange

Studying the Bible in its truth and purity is more important than playing a game, but the two activities are remarkably similar.

You might have first played your favorite game because it was introduced to you by friends or relatives. Whether it is a sport, something on the computer, or a game you play around a table, you can often go back to the first time you played it and remember how much fun you had.

I didn't say that you were good at the game at first, but you kept playing. Why did you continue playing? What intrigued you enough to put in the time? You probably remember the early mistakes, the moments when you mastered some nuance, and the satisfaction you felt when it was clear that you were improving.

Now that you are good at your favorite game, isn't it strange that the repetition is not boring? It's satisfying to have learned the basics, and it's interesting to see how the game turns out when it goes different directions. It just doesn't get old.

Studying the Bible in its truth and purity is more important than playing a game, but the two activities are remarkably similar.

When you know your way around the Bible, it doesn't get old. The familiar passages are comforting, and the light they shed on new passages is amazing. When you have learned to see Jesus at the center of the Bible, every verse becomes clearer. When you distinguish law and gospel, the whole text snaps into focus.

It's satisfying to see others come into contact with the passages that are familiar to you. They suddenly look up from the passage with looks of understanding. What a difference it makes when a person discovers forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ without any strings attached. It's life-changing! It's also fasci-

nating to see how the Holy Spirit takes that knowledge and confidence in different directions.

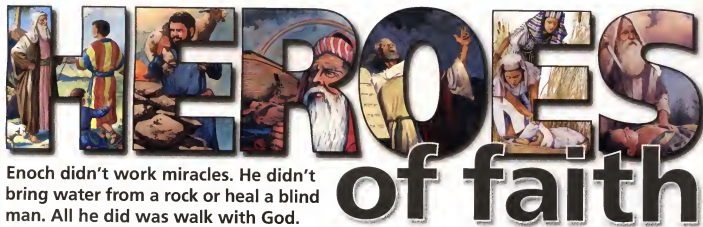
You'd think that it would be boring to keep looking at the same old book. But it turns out to be satisfying instead, because you need the comfort and direction that God has put into his inspired Word. Each life is different, so the same comfort of God's Word finds its way into the dark corners of each individual's heart.

It's not surprising that God has supplied you with exactly the comfort and direction that you need in the Bible. He introduces himself to you through his Word, and you get to know him better as you read and listen, mark and inwardly digest every verse.

Many of you were introduced to the Bible when God baptized you and made you his child by the power of his Word. You were introduced to the power of the Word by people you know, and you have a personal relationship with Jesus now. Those intriguing relationships grow as you remain and continue in the Word of God.

Why put time into continuing education in the Word of God? Well, the inspired Scripture is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus himself said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31,32).

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HEROES of faith

Enoch didn't work miracles. He didn't bring water from a rock or heal a blind man. All he did was walk with God.

David D. Sternhagen

"The only thing that you can't escape," it is said, "is death and taxes." The one I'm beginning to think is true, but the other we know is absolutely not true. We know of two people who did not experience physical death: Elijah, who was taken directly to heaven in a whirlwind, and Enoch, the man who is our hero of faith this month.

If you are thinking that because they made it without dying maybe you won't have to die, the odds aren't in your favor, unless, of course, you are here on earth when Jesus comes back. Otherwise, it's a pretty rare blessing. So why was this hero of faith so blessed?

ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD

Enoch doesn't get much publicity in the Bible—six verses in the Old Testament (Genesis 5:18-24) and four verses in the New Testament (Luke 3:37, Hebrews 11:5,6, Jude 14). From this snapshot of his life we learn that he was a prophet (Jude), that he pleased God (Hebrews), that he walked with God (Genesis), and that the Lord took him to heaven without death (Genesis and Hebrews). That's it.

According to our reading, Enoch pleased God, and God blessed him by taking him to heaven without dying. "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death. . . . For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).

The fundamental truth of Christianity is simple: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). What kind of faith did Enoch have?

Before the flood, people lived a long time. Even though Enoch lived more than six hundred years after Adam and Eve, Adam was still alive and could have talked to Enoch face-to-face. If he had those conversations, Adam would have shared the events of the garden and God's great promises of a descen-

dant of Eve crushing Satan's head. Adam trusted that God was sending a Savior for the world. Enoch believed that too. Enoch's faith prompted him to want to please his God. In the Old Testament his faith in action is described as "walking with God." And God took him—no death.

WE NEED TO WALK WITH THE LORD

It is significant that one of the "heroes of faith" was a man who walked with God. He didn't work miracles. He didn't bring water from a rock or heal a blind man. All he did was walk with God.

Think about what that means. Walking with someone means that you are together and going in the same direction all the time. You wouldn't call meeting each other at various points along the way, "walking together." Walking together implies stepping out into a new day with the Lord

at your side. As you walk together, you listen and talk to each other about where you are going. You are walking together, not always knowing what will happen but with the same goal in mind. Temptations and distractions don't separate you from your walk together. You know that there will be difficulties, but you are confident because you are walking with the One who can get you through anything. "Faith is being . . .

certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

Look at Jesus and see how much God loves you. Then, in the strength of his love, walk with God each day like Enoch, the hero of faith.

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This is the third article in a 12-part series on Old Testament heroes of faith.



John A. Banerjee

[Jesus'] empty tomb is the only hope in death's cold, dark hour.

Real warmth

Peter stood close enough to the fire to warm himself. The night was cold, and those in the camp of the Lord's enemies surrounded him. He was alone and intimidated by those with a different view of things. He denied knowing Jesus.

The story is familiar, of course. But what about those huddled around the fire? They wanted warmth from the cool night air but denied their greater need. Moses, as a psalm writer, captured what most deny or refuse to think about: "The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:10).

Life is a short opportunity. When it's over, we will stand before a holy, perfect, powerful judge. Like those in the courtyard, many are satisfied with temporary fires. They focus on their own comfort, their livelihood, and their families. Chilling thoughts about death and eternity can be denied.

Because they choose to deny these realities, they cannot accept the warm solution to sin and death God provided in Jesus. That night long ago, the Lord of heaven, that powerful judge, was only a few feet away. He had come to earth to give his life for sinners. He would shed his blood and die. He had already begun the way of sorrows, and the end would be an empty tomb. He promised, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19).

Culture, race, time, and geography don't change this scene. The human heart by itself sees death, sin, tragedy, and misery every day but chooses to deny that God has provided a long-term solution. Instead, it warms itself at the fires of its own thinking and imagination. God's warm, eternal fire remains unimportant to it.

Today many have decided that truth does not exist. One person's faith is as good as another's. The end of each person's life is coming, but it's the journey that is important, not the end. Besides, so the thinking goes, more than one way to heaven exists, and God accepts us all. Whether the philosophy is postmodern, modern, post-postmodern, or none of the above, the warmth of these fires works only a little while. Death and judgment are realities that can be denied only until they happen.

Peter, for a time, also denied his own life's end and judgment. He became one of those stretching out his hands for warmth from a temporary fire. Then, the Lord who would suffer, die, and rise from the dead looked his way, and Peter wept. He went out—away from the courtyard fire—and wept.

Everything came into focus again. Like the other disciples he would be stunned by the empty tomb. He and John together raced to the grave on Easter morning. It was empty. Jesus was not dead. He was alive.

Later Peter reminded believers to avoid the temporary fires of the world without Jesus. He didn't want others to do as he did. Instead, he advised, "Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

All around us people still sit at fires that offer no warmth in the face of sin and death. Those people may want to deny death, sin, and judgment, but don't be intimidated. Simply lean over and with respect gently confess that Jesus lives. His blood—painfully shed—cleanses sinners, and his empty tomb is the only hope in death's cold, dark hour.



Donald W. Patterson

Portraits of a mature Christian

An aptitude for using the Scriptures properly

When I was about 19 years old I ran across this passage, 1 Corinthians 11:21: "For as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk." Shortly after reading that passage, I proudly announced to a group of friends, "Did you know that the Bible teaches that you should wait for everyone else to get their food before eating?" They stared at me curiously since I had made such a grand statement about such a small matter. But none of them knew the Bible any better than I did so it was difficult for them to critique my unsolicited knowledge. Later that evening I went back to find the passage I had quoted, and I checked the context. The passage isn't really about table manners as much as it is about manners regarding the Lord's Supper. I had hijacked the verse and made it say what I thought it should say. I was embarrassed.

This "hijacking" of God's Word happens a lot. People look in the Bible to see if they can make it say what they want it to say instead of what God wants it to say. The result is confusion and false teaching. God doesn't want to be misunderstood or have his words taken out of context any more than we do. In his Word, he says exactly what he wants us to know. When we change that, we misrepresent him to ourselves and others. There is too much at stake. Many have lost their eternal salvation because they followed teachers who used the Bible but who were not really telling what it says. Mature Christians work hard at handling God's Word correctly.

The apostle Paul told his young pastor friend Timothy this very same thing. Timothy was responsible for teaching a lot of people in and around Ephesus. If he misused God's Word, it would affect many souls. So Paul impressed on Timothy that before teaching he had to slow down and study God's Word well, so that he would not misrepresent God and later become ashamed of it. Look at how Paul said it:

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Why do you think Paul said that when Timothy was teaching he was presenting himself to God?
2. Why is it so important for a Bible teacher to make sure that everything he or she teaches is truly biblical teaching?
3. What exactly does it mean to "correctly handle the word of truth"?
4. When the truth is handled correctly, what happens for the hearers?

TREASURES TO SHARE

1. What are some simple guidelines we can follow to help ourselves understand God's Word correctly?
2. How does the context before and after a passage help us properly understand the passage itself?
3. List as many passages that you can think of that have been taken out of their context.
4. Take a passage of Scripture and study it well in its context. Then write a devotion about that passage and send it in an e-mail to your friends and family. Ask them to respond by telling you what they learned from it.

RELATED SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Isaiah 8:20	Hebrews 4:12
John 8:31,32	1 Peter 4:11
2 Corinthians 4:2	2 Peter 1:19
2 Peter 3:16	

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This is the sixth article in a 12-part series on Christian maturity. Find this study and answers online after Apr. 5 at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist.



Everything in its place

Aaron L. Christie

Jesus' resurrection has a way of putting things back in their proper place.

We like things in their proper place. Dress socks in the top drawer, tube socks in the second drawer. Cereal on the bottom shelf, soup one shelf up. Bills in the wicker basket, junk mail in the wastebasket.

How animated we become when things aren't where they should be! Car keys grow a five-year-old's feet. A BlackBerry with e-mail, appointments, and contacts quietly slips under a car seat. Life is put on hold until the lost is found.

MARY'S DOUBT WAS OUT OF PLACE

If we feel this way about missing car keys and Blackberries, how did Mary feel when she realized that Jesus' body was not in its proper place? The body of the master was missing. Wasn't Friday's crucifixion humiliating enough?

But what was really out of place? Mary's doubt! Hadn't Jesus promised his resurrection—specifically on the third day? Had Jesus ever left a promise unkept? No, not one. Yet Mary was so overcome with grief, so preoccupied with the business of a proper burial, so concerned with her uncertain future, that she had simply lost sight of Jesus' promise. She replaced Jesus' clear resurrection promise with her messy human doubts and fears.

Jesus tidied up Mary's heart with a single word: "Mary!" Doubt was driven out. Faith filled doubt's place. The Lord is alive! Mary's sin is paid for. Mary's eternal future is assured by a walking, talking Lord, who had just been to death and back for her!

JESUS PUTS OUR WORRIES IN THEIR PROPER PLACE

What's out of place for you this Easter? Is Easter threatening to become a mess of bunnies and bonnets, ham

and turkey, relatives and relaxation? Does Jesus feel as far away as Pluto and the worries of today as close as the nose on your face? How out of place our priorities and doubts can be! An Easter ham and an hour on the sofa have never once saved a soul from hell. No human loss is bigger than the Lord's ability to bless. And yes, it's true: God owns property on Pluto; actually he owns all the real estate there and everywhere. But what is critically important for you is that your living Lord is as close to you as his body and blood in bread and wine, as close as the letters on the pages of your Bible, as close as his promise to be with you always. Jesus lives! Your sins are paid for. Jesus' resurrection swallows up your death. Your personal resurrection is assured by a walking, talking, bodily resurrected Lord!

Jesus' resurrection has a way of putting things back in their proper place. Do you feel your sin? Who doesn't! Jesus put your sin in its place by his death on the cross. Do you fear sickness and death? Jesus knocked the teeth out of those monsters. Do you fear the devil's power in the world and in your life? Satan has been put in his place—a dreadful and eternal place! These Easter truths have a way of putting the rest of our lives in their proper place. Bonnets are beautiful when they cover the head of a baptized daughter of Christ. Hams are heavenly when they sit on a table surrounded by friends and family who love the resurrected Christ. Relaxation is refreshing when one knows that eternal rest is assured through Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus is in his proper place too, living and reigning at his Father's right hand. What joy is yours as you prepare to receive your proper place—a place prepared by him for you (John 14:2).

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